



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

About Greenways and Trails

Greenways may range from narrow corridors of undeveloped landscape that run through urban and suburban development, to wide corridors that incorporate diverse natural and cultural features. A greenway can be land-or water-based. It can incorporate both public and private property but always provides benefits for the larger community. Some are primarily recreational corridors, while others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not necessarily intended for substantial human passage. Some greenways run along stream corridors, shorelines, or wetlands; others follow abandoned railway tracks or other land-based features.

Greenways differ in their location and function, but a greenway network will protect natural and cultural resources, provide recreational opportunities, improve and sustain hydrological functions, and enhance the natural beauty and the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities.

In this plan, regional trails are multi-jurisdictional facilities offering recreational opportunities and transportation uses, connecting communities and greenways throughout the region. While on-road bicycling presents many benefits, the emphasis in this plan is primarily existing and planned off-road facilities. The proposed trail alignments in the plan are conceptual and long-range. Regional trails include a variety of facility types suitable for bicycling, walking, and paddling, but they also offer diverse uses such as roller-blading, equestrian activities, and cross-country skiing.

This plan emphasizes connectivity between regional trails, forest preserves, and conservation areas. Many of the trails in this plan offer a “green experience” in the midst of a highly urbanized environment. It also emphasizes consistency with local and county trail plans, enhancing opportunities to partner in the implementation of this plan.



Image courtesy of Joe Balyinas

The Need for a Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

A greenways and trails plan offers a vision of continuous greenway and trail corridors linked across jurisdictions, providing scenic beauty, natural habitat, and/or recreational opportunities for our communities. Many jurisdictions govern land use and landscape design in northeastern Illinois, so developing a regionally coordinated and connected vision of greenways and trails across these jurisdictions can inform local land use decisions, hopefully while inspiring decisions about development that are consistent with the greenways and trails identified. In addition, greenways and trails projects, including land acquisition, can enhance our communities. Greenway projects inspired by this plan offer some combination of the following characteristics:

- Benefits large populations in multiple communities
- Bridges gaps to help complete greenways
- Creates new connections between greenways
- Provides wildlife migration paths between isolated natural areas
- Protects tributary streams to preserve water quality and ecological value in main regional waterways
- Protects residential and commercial areas threatened by flood damage
- Improves access to recreational trails where it is currently lacking
- Protects high quality natural areas threatened by development
- Protects important scenic vistas and historic areas from development
- Increases access to open space for mature and distressed communities with disadvantaged populations
- Offers a variety of recreational uses
- Provides alternative transportation routes (walking, bicycling) and improves access to public transportation systems



Image courtesy of Courtesy of Lake County Forest Preserve District



Image courtesy of Openlands



Image courtesy of Lake County Forest Preserve District

A Changing Environment for Greenway Planning

The Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan was first adopted in 1992 and then updated in 1997. Changes in northeastern Illinois have brought on the need to update the plan. For one, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) was created in 2005 as the official regional planning organization for the northeastern Illinois counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will. By state and federal law, CMAP is responsible for developing **GO TO 2040**, metropolitan Chicago's first truly comprehensive regional plan. To be implemented starting in fall 2010, the plan will be based on a diverse, coordinated set of strategies for transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues. By incorporating the Greenways and Trails Plan as part of the overall vision for 2040, CMAP's **GO TO 2040** plan will strengthen and support the implementation of proposed regional trails and greenways.

There are additional changes that can have a positive impact on the implementation of the Greenways and Trails Plan: Kendall county has become part of the northeastern Illinois planning area; the serious water supply concerns in this region are beginning to be addressed through the Regional Water Supply Planning initiative; residents of northeastern Illinois are facing health concerns related to physical inactivity, which can be addressed by providing more recreational opportunities and connections to the natural environment; and, as awareness of the need to address climate change increases, so does recognition of the value of greenways in sequestering carbon and promoting walking and biking over automobile use to lessen our region's carbon emissions. Additionally, greenways can be a viable use for some contaminated sites after they are cleaned up.

The 100th anniversary of Burnham and Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago* also brings to the fore historic initiatives and visionary goals for the region concerning nature, open space, and green corridors, including the establishment of forest preserves, improvement of the lakefront, and efforts to develop and protect a system of connected open spaces. The public's enthusiasm about this anniversary could have a lasting impact on the realization of Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan.



Image courtesy of CMAP Staff

Image courtesy of CMAP Staff

Image courtesy of St. Charles Park District

Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

Map and Summary 2009 Update

Key Features of the Map

This map updates existing and proposed regional greenways and trails, open space, and connections among them. It includes the locations of Illinois Nature Preserves and sites on the Illinois and county Natural Areas Inventories. Many of these high-quality areas are within designated greenways or existing open space and need to be protected. The regional trail system may, where appropriate, provide opportunities for viewing these areas, but care must be taken to protect fragile natural area resources from adverse impacts. Unprotected natural areas sites need to be given preservation status through acquisition or other means, as appropriate.

Greenways shown as existing on the map are protected for public purposes, and the trails that are shown as existing are completed and open to the public. Proposed trails as illustrated are largely conceptual and final alignments would be determined by the jurisdiction through its planning and engineering processes. A more detailed map and database are available from CMAP to coordinate such planning. While some of the connecting trail proposals that are fairly close together are shown as one corridor on the map, the greenway plan facilities in the CMAP database reflect both.

Stream Greenways are a vital part of this plan; they are focal points for environmental education and stewardship; they can provide valued opportunities for canoeing and kayaking; they can be rich centers of biodiversity; and they can provide important water quality, water supply and flood mitigation functions. All streams in this plan are considered existing or proposed greenways.

Trail Greenways offer, for most of their length, a “green” experience and include relatively large amounts of vegetation or scenic vistas. Off-road paths along a highly developed corridor with very little vegetation for example, are not shown with a green buffer.

The **Primary Regional Trail System** identified on this map is the “backbone” of the trail network, which also includes important existing and proposed trails that make critical links and interconnections. Trails that connect the regional system, forest preserves and conservation areas are identified as primary; trail loops within forest preserves and conservation areas that don't provide connections to the regional system are not generally included. Connections that follow more circuitous routes and those that would depend on development of a number of adjacent trails to connect to the major trails are not included. The Primary System designation does not necessarily indicate priority trails for development, however many coincide with the county priorities listed in the plan document.



The **Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trails Plan** is a regional system of existing and proposed trails for non-motorized boating. It provides a framework for trail development on over 500 miles of streams and lakes on 10 major waterways including Lake Michigan, Fox River, Chicago River, Des Plaines River, Salt Creek, DuPage River, Nippersink Creek, Kishwaukee River, Calumet Area Waterways, and the Kankakee River. One hundred and sixty-six access and portage sites are proposed to connect the system, of which 110 have been established (see inset map). For more information and the full-sized map, visit <http://openlands.org/index.php/Greenways/Projects/northeastern-illinois-water-trails.html>.

Conceptual map of the Route 66 and Grand Illinois Trails*



*map does not distinguish between existing and proposed segments

The **Grand Illinois Trail (GIT)** is a 500-mile loop for hiking and biking that uses existing trails (and will use planned ones) in northeastern Illinois, as shown on the main map. Major greenway plan trails are included in this loop, as well as some signed on-road routes essential to creating the loop. The entire GIT in Northeastern Illinois is included on the map.

The **Route 66 Trail** (off-road segments only) is a plan to give trail users opportunities to explore sights, cities, towns, and rural areas of Route 66. The vision consists of off-road paths and comfortable roads for bicycles, equestrians, hikers. In cases where the route coincides with major greenway trails, it is identified on this map, while on-road segments are not included. The route consists of both existing and proposed segments as shown on the main map.

Image courtesy of Dan Burden



Image courtesy of the Forest Preserve District of Will County



The Plan Document

The plan includes actions that would contribute to implementation of the plan. These recommended actions in the plan are not necessarily site specific, but may indicate general priority areas. The seven general objectives identified in the plan are contained in the following list.

- Objective 1:** Preserve Additional Greenway Open Space
- Objective 2:** Preserve and Improve the Quality and Biodiversity of Existing Open Space, including Greenways
- Objective 3:** Improve the Effectiveness and Use of Trails
- Objective 4:** Expand the Existing Regional Trail System and Create Linkages
- Objective 5:** Expand the Region's Efforts to Protect, Restore and Utilize Water-Based Greenways
- Objective 6:** Improve the Transportation Benefits of Trails
- Objective 7:** Sustain and Strengthen the Funding Base for Trails and Greenways

Implementation of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan will require a partnership effort among state natural resource and transportation agencies, forest preserve and park districts, county and municipal governments, conservation and recreation advocacy organizations, and private landowners. Specific actions to implement the seven objectives are detailed in the plan document.

An important function of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan and the plan map is to support the programs of open space jurisdictions which are working to preserve and manage greenway corridors. Much of the on-the-ground implementation will occur through the initiative of the forest preserve and conservation districts, park districts, municipalities, counties, and state and federal agencies, including the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Department of Transportation. The open space, outdoor recreation, and natural resource advocacy organizations of the region play an invaluable role in plan implementation.

*This summary is intended as an overview of the officially adopted Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan. The plan and map are on CMAP's website at www.cmap.illinois.gov.

For more specific information about regional existing or proposed trails, such as where proposals originated, contact CMAP at 312-454-0400.

About CMAP

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is the official comprehensive regional planning organization for the seven counties of northeastern Illinois. CMAP's innovative **GO TO 2040** planning campaign is developing and implementing strategies to address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality of life issues. See www.cmap.illinois.gov for more information.



Image courtesy of Charles Johnson, Illinois Prairie Path
Cover image courtesy of Marianne Natarajan